

Durham Research Online

Deposited in DRO:

24 January 2017

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Harding, J. (2015) 'Later Eliot and Pound.', in A history of modernist poetry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 398-416.

Further information on publisher's website:

<http://www.cambridge.org/catalogue/catalogue.asp?isbn=9781316308851>

Publisher's copyright statement:

This material has been published in A History of Modernist Poetry / edited by Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins. This version is free to view and download for personal use only. Not for re-distribution, re-sale or use in derivative works. © 2015 Cambridge University Press

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

Later Eliot and Pound

When T. S. Eliot returned to England in the summer of 1933, following a nine-month absence in the United States, he faced an uncertain future. This was a period of great personal upheavals, following separation from his wife Vivienne and residence in a series of temporary lodgings. Eliot feared that his best poetry was behind him. Out of this anxious solitude emerged the “Landscapes” sequence. These brief lyric sketches are grouped in the “minor” poems section of *Collected Poems* (1936), leading to an undeserved critical neglect. They record the first experimental ventures of Eliot’s late style. The principal themes of *Four Quartets* are rehearsed: meditations on time and memory, visionary scenery, beginnings and ends. The virtuoso rhythmical variations of “Landscapes” perform grave adagios as well as the brisk notes of playful scherzos, anticipating the musical transitions of *Four Quartets*.

Eliot chose to begin the sequence with the two American landscapes first published together as “Words for Music”. The lilting rhythms of “New Hampshire” reflect the uplift of children at play (“Swing up into the apple-tree”), here shadowed by the nostalgia of the older man (“Twenty years and the spring is over”). The obdurateness of the sluggish “red river” in “Virginia” mirrors the poet’s state of mind at the time he delivered his notoriously intolerant Page-Barbour lectures at Virginia in May 1933: “Iron thoughts came with me / And go with me”. The succeeding British landscapes are plangent. The internal rhymes of “Usk” thread undulating country lanes, past the enchantment of a Monmouthshire pub, towards the spiritual sanctuary of “The hermit’s chapel, the pilgrim’s prayer.” The sombre assonances of “Rannoch, by Glencoe” (“the soft moor / And the soft sky”) bring to mind ancient historical wrong, a clan massacre of 1692, depicting a barren symbolic wasteland of dry bones. “Cape Ann”, the final poem of the sequence, returns us to Eliot’s American past. The ornithologist’s spirited taxonomy of birdcalls (“O quick quick quick, quick hear the song-sparrow, swamp-sparrow, fox-sparrow, vesper-sparrow”) engenders a youthful excitement. It is only a short flight to the opening of “Burnt Norton”: “Quick, said the bird . . . Through the first gate, / Into our first world.”

“Burnt Norton” took shape from passages discarded from Eliot’s verse drama *Murder in the Cathedral* produced at the Canterbury Festival in June 1935. Aspects of Thomas Becket’s temptation and martyrdom reappear, albeit transfigured by the new “landscape” of Burnt Norton, then a deserted Gloucestershire manor house that Eliot visited with Emily Hale in September 1934. Eliot’s intimate friendship with Hale has been the subject of much biographical speculation, yet this poem cannot be explained as a romantic *roman à clef* since it traces a purgatorial journey. The poet dispossesses himself of worldly things in an inward struggle to apprehend “the still point of the turning world”. This is not to mistake “Burnt Norton” for devotional verse, a genre that Eliot slighted in his Virginia lectures.¹

The first fourteen lines of “Burnt Norton” use a speech written for the Second Priest in *Murder in the Cathedral*: these lines are an abstract philosophical or, better, metaphysical enquiry into the destructive nature of time and death. Two epigraphs from Heraclitus – fragments of ancient Greek gesturing towards the reconciliation of opposites and an underlying oneness – indicate that this poetry will not yield its riches to purely logical analysis.² In the poem’s opening movement *present*, *past* and *future* exchange places in an intricate geometrical dance, unravelling theological paradoxes in the manner of St Augustine’s search within his memory for the eternal present of God:³

Time present and time past
 Are both perhaps present in time future,
 And time future contained in time past.
 If all time is eternally present
 All time is unredeemable.
 What might have been is an abstraction
 Remaining a perpetual possibility
 Only in a world of speculation.
 What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.
 Footfalls echo in the memory
 Down the passage which we did not take
 Towards the door we never opened
 Into the rose-garden.

Explorations of the garden of memory in “Burnt Norton” are peopled by the ghosts of childhood possibilities and actual experiences, including an ecstatic vision in the rose garden of the “heart of light” which may be an illusion. Later, the fallen earthly world is described as a “place of disaffection”. The speaker of the poem bids us “Descend lower” (travel on the London Underground becomes a descent into the underworld) in order to embrace the divine darkness of the “Dark Night of the Soul” as recounted by the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic St John of the Cross – this ascetic *via negativa* entails the mortification of the flesh, dying to the world, in preparation for the soul’s union with God.

Reviewers in 1936 regarded “Burnt Norton” as a new development in Eliot’s oeuvre. A perceptive article by D. W. Harding credited the poem with the “creation of concepts”: a “linguistic achievement” inflecting abstract counters with personal feeling.⁴ The symbolist word music of “Burnt Norton” can often be of a spell-binding Mallarméan opacity. The poem communicates through the articulation of significant pattern: “Only by the form, the pattern, / Can words or music reach / The stillness”.⁵ The word “pattern” and the idea of pattern deepen into a complex keyword over the course of the *Quartets*.⁶ In an essay on the symbolist poet and theorist Paul Valéry, Eliot wrote of “a recognition of the truth that not our feelings, but the pattern which we may make of our feelings, is the centre of value.”⁷ Pattern, then, is a principle of organization, objectifying emotion in a work of art, reconciling opposites by synthesis of the temporal and eternal, change and permanence, movement and stillness, light and dark, speech and silence, past and future, the actual and the imagined. Pattern for Eliot is concomitant with belief in metaphysical order. In music, pattern emerges from the elaboration of recurring motifs. In a letter to John Hayward of 1942, Eliot was explicit about the analogy between music and the *Quartets*: “the notion of making a poem by weaving in together three or four superficially unrelated themes: the ‘poem’ being the degree of success in making a new whole out of them.”⁸ In the five-part structure established by “Burnt Norton”, the final section of each quartet examines the task of writing poetry within the context of the poem’s larger design. This is a highly self-conscious sequence that proceeds not through linear progression but by expansive spiralling movements from the personal, to the historical, yearning for the mystic’s intersection with the timeless.

It wasn’t until the outbreak of the Second World War, disrupting the London theatres, that Eliot conceived of “Burnt Norton” as the first in a series of *Quartets*.

“East Coker” was drafted in February 1940, a further voyage into the past prompted by Eliot’s visits, during the summers of 1936 and 1937, to the Somerset village of his ancestors.⁹ The archaic Tudor spelling copied from Sir Thomas Elyot’s *Boke Named the Governour* is the American-born poet’s quaint act of piety. “In my beginning is my end . . . In my end is my beginning” plays upon Mary Stuart’s motto *En ma fin est mon commencement*. An allusive mélange in “East Coker” – placing the “grimpen” in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* alongside the *Divine Comedy*’s dark wood – is curious given the emphasis in the poem on “the wisdom of humility”. It is clear from the lines adapted from St John of the Cross (“In order to possess what you do not possess / You must go by the way of dispossession”) that Christian humility is at stake.¹⁰ Wishful thinking propels materialist bankers, businessmen and politicians “into the dark” of an abyss of non-being rather than the purifying “darkness of God” dear to St John.

In a letter to Anne Ridler, Eliot referred to a Jansenist streak in “East Coker”.¹¹ In Part IV Christ’s sacrificial atonement (“bleeding hands”) for Original Sin is figured as the “wounded surgeon” who redeems the estate bequeathed by Adam, the “ruined millionaire”. In its solemn allegorical treatment of orthodox Christian doctrine, this section of “East Coker” risks preaching only to the penitential and lacks the sensuous beauty of the flash of the kingfisher’s wing in the corresponding lyric fourth part of “Burnt Norton”. The closing section, picking up again the neo-symbolist discourse on the “intolerable wrestle” to master language, is more satisfying as poetry: “one has only learnt to get the better of words / For the thing one no longer has to say” recasts a Nietzschean aphorism,¹² although its gloomy note struck some observers as a defeatist thing to say in the midst of a war terminally threatening the English rural traditions dramatized in “East Coker”. Nevertheless, the communal language of wartime does permeate this passage, from the “raid on the inarticulate / With *shabby equipment*” to “*Undisciplined squads* of emotion”, not least the martial determination “to conquer / By strength and submission” in “*the fight to recover* what has been lost” (emphasis added). No doubt, the “folly” of “old men” was seen by a large number of readers in 1940 as applicable to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and the statesmen who had failed to avert another global conflict.

Donald Davie described “The Dry Salvages” as a war poem. Thoughts of the “distress of nations and perplexity / Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware Road” came naturally to those who read about the catastrophic fall of Singapore in the London press. “Pray for all those who are in ships” resonated at the height of a heavy toll on the Atlantic convoys. Davie, however, was unforgiving about the unevenness of this particular Quartet: lines such as “I do not know much about gods; but . . .” or “I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant” were scolded as the gaucherie of an “uncomfortable poseur” and he winced at the progressive degeneration of Eliot’s rhymes in the modified sestina – “motionless . . . emotionless . . . devotionless . . . oceanless . . . erosionless” (a weak echo of the grandeur of Coleridge’s caverns “measureless to man”).¹³ The flat prosaic pulse of utterance in stretches of “The Dry Salvages” lends itself easily to parody; although Davie was not alone in wondering whether the ponderous plod of this colloquial idiom wasn’t Possum’s self-parody.¹⁴

Elsewhere, the intensity of Eliot’s auditory imagination is quickened and salted by the surge of boyhood memories of the Massachusetts coast; sea sounds and sea imagery shroud the American topography of “The Dry Salvages” in a symbolic aura:

And the ragged rock in the restless waters,
Waves wash over it, fogs conceal it;

On a halcyon day it is merely a monument,
 In navigable weather it is always a seamark
 To lay a course by: but in the sombre season
 Or the sudden fury, is what it always was.

Held in a choppy rhythmic swell, affording glimpses of the beacon of faith, “The Dry Salvages” contains wonderful evocations of the sea. In part four, the tenderness of the prayer to the Virgin Mary for safe passage is a gesture of hope in a poem troubled by religious scepticism. “For most of us”, unlike the saint, “hints and guesses” buttressed by a patient ritual of “prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action” must sustain the faithful against doubt. According to Eliot, “scepticism and disillusion are a useful equipment for religious understanding”; they are constant companions in the perilous theological and psychological voyage undertaken by the *Quartets*.¹⁵

The culminating poem of the sequence, “Little Gidding”, challenged the poet to orchestrate the interrelated themes in a purgatorial finale. When Eliot sent the first full draft to John Hayward in the summer of 1941, they agreed that it was “unfinished and unpolished”.¹⁶ Due to chronic ill health and war work, Eliot was unable to finish revising the poem for a year. When he did, the exacting Hayward (whom Eliot later publicly credited with “improvements of phrase and construction”) collaborated in a painstaking search for *le mot juste*.¹⁷ The polished poem displays stylistic assurance: “The formal word precise but not pedantic, / The complete consort dancing together”.

“Little Gidding” opens in “Sempiternal” season of “Midwinter spring”: winter sun sparkles on ice, painting the hedges in snow-blossom, warming a spirit lit by the “pentecostal fire” of the Holy Ghost. Eliot visited the remote Huntingdonshire church at Little Gidding, the centre of an Anglican monastic community, on 25 May 1936. He knew George Every’s play depicting Charles I’s arrival here as “a broken king”. For the Royalist Anglo-Catholic, Little Gidding was a place “Where prayer has been valid”: a refuge in time of national crisis, whether Civil or World War. In the closing movement, thoughts of Little Gidding permit the verse to swell with a patriotic pride: “while the light fails / On a winter’s afternoon, in a secluded chapel / History is now and England.”

For millions, history now in England meant existing amid the destruction of German bombing: “This is the death of water and fire.” Helen Gardner observed that: “Anyone who lived through the London raids must link water and fire as equally destructive, remembering the charred and sodden ruins and their smell the morning after as the great hoses played on the flaming and smoking ruins.”¹⁸ The scene in the London Blitz after an air raid, in which the fire-warden receives wisdom from a “dead master”, caused Eliot greater labour than any other passage of comparable length. It is modelled on Dante’s encounter with Brunetto Latini in *Inferno* XV, composed in an imitation of *terza rima* alternating unrhymed trochaic and iambic endings. Hayward sharpened successive drafts of this passage. He prompted Eliot to locate the time of day from the limp “at dawn”, the antique “after lantern-end”, the ornate “antelucan hour”, to an eerie “waning dusk”. This strange meeting is Yeatsian phantasmagoria, summoning the ghost of the poet whom Eliot belatedly recognised as the “master” of the preceding generation. Once scolded for his pursuit of strange gods, Eliot honours Yeats for refining the English language and marvels at the wild old poet’s passionate lust and rage. The familiar ghost’s astringent narrative of “the gifts reserved for age” constructs a pastiche of late Yeats’s austere diction, driving rhythms and occult mythology.¹⁹

First, the cold friction of expiring sense
 Without enchantment, offering no promise
 But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
 As body and soul begin to fall asunder.
 Second, the conscious impotence of rage
 At human folly, and the laceration
 Of laughter at what ceases to amuse.
 And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
 Of all that you have done, and been; the shame
 Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
 Of things ill done and done to others' harm
 Which once you took for exercise of virtue.
 Then fools' approval stings, and honour stains.

It was Hayward who introduced the Swiftian "laceration".²⁰ The shame of "things ill done" involves contemplating the lament in "The Dry Salvages" for "Years of living among the breakage / Of what was believed in as the most reliable". The ghost's lines are spoken with Yeats's life-affirming pride not Eliot's accent of Christian humility, thus complicating interpretations that read an accusation Eliot abandoned Vivienne in an asylum into this confession.²¹ A crucial moment of Eliot's "dead patrol" with his Yeatsian alter ego is the admission: "Too strange to each other for misunderstanding." Eliot was concerned readers would identify Yeats and imagine him in hell, whereas the allusion to the ghost of Hamlet's father (who "faded on the crowing of the cock" at daybreak, just as Eliot's revenant "faded on the blowing of the horn" sounding the All Clear) identifies this scene as purgatorial.

In the apocalyptic fourth section, "The dove descending breaks the air / With flame of incandescent terror" (later set to music by Stravinsky), a warplane unleashes Pentecostal fire incinerating sensual desires. "Little Gidding" boldly interweaves the medieval mystic's intuition of Divine Love – "With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling" from *The Cloud of Unknowing* is allied to Julian of Norwich's "All shall be well and / All manner of thing shall be well" – into the deadly darkness of wartime London, preparing for the climactic Dantean vision of the mystic rose.²² The circuitous pilgrimage of "Little Gidding" reprises elements from each Quartet. It closes by revisiting the rose garden of "Burnt Norton" with deepened spiritual insight:

Quick now, here, now, always —
 A condition of complete simplicity
 (Costing not less than everything)
 And all shall be well and
 All manner of thing shall be well
 When the tongues of flame are in-folded
 Into the crowned knot of fire
 And the fire and the rose are one.

Eliot was a poet and not a mystic. *Four Quartets* presents a partial revelation of grace, one clinched artistically by Hayward's improvement of the halting rhythm of the draft "the fire and the rose are the same" to the decisive "And the fire and the rose are one."

In his 1933 Virginia lectures, Eliot described Ezra Pound as “probably the most important living poet in our language.” In particular, he admired Pound’s mastery of free verse rhythms, the “continuous identification of form and feeling” he had earlier singled out for praise. Eliot, however, was more complimentary about the technique of *The Cantos* than their contents. His Virginia lectures wondered whether Pound’s ignorance of Chinese language and society undermined an advocacy of Confucian values. Eliot also offered a critique of the hostility displayed in *The Cantos* towards “politicians, profiteers, financiers, newspaper proprietors and their hired men” as a hell for “*other people*” and therefore “a perfectly comfortable one for the modern mind to contemplate.”²³ In spite of his reservations, Eliot remained a loyal publisher of *The Cantos* during a period when a select readership struggled through polemical sections attacking the capitalist banking system, recounting in a bizarrely abbreviated form swathes of Chinese dynastic history or the putative ideals of America’s founding fathers. Eliot recommended to Faber’s book committee Pound’s eccentric, assertive, prose guidebook to his obsessions – Confucianism; monetary reform; medievalism; Italian Fascism – published as *Guide to Kulchur* (1938): “for the judicious who know how to trim the boat with their own intelligence there is a good deal of wisdom”; but even Eliot’s patience wore thin when Pound complained bitterly at not being allowed to libel the Rothschild family in *The Cantos* as one of the Jewish banking dynasties to blame for the corruption of Western civilization.²⁴

Pound was in the habit of saying that his modernist epic was modelled on the examples of Homer’s *Odyssey* and Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. *The Cantos* open with the wanderings of Odysseus and contain a Hell group (Cantos 14-16) sketching a Dantean inferno, and yet these structural parallels are misleading. As this highly experimental sequence appeared, it became clear that there could be no continuous narrative to such cryptic, elliptical, allusive poetics. Pound’s disciples asked readers to wait for a full complement of one hundred cantos to resolve into order the scattered threads of this “poem of some length”. Unlike Dante’s, Pound’s paradise emerged only as fleeting and fugitive glimpses. It is customary to point towards Pound’s conception of the “ideogrammic method” as the rationale for the wilful syncretism of *The Cantos* which juxtapose in an Imagist paratactic syntax a wide variety of materials – a mixture of languages and literatures, archival documents, letters, private anecdotes, economics, anthropology, mythology, politics – without discursive narrative connections.²⁵ Many contemporaries experienced the open form of *The Cantos* as arbitrary and incoherent. Pound declared that an epic is a “poem including history” and it has been suggested that living through the apocalyptic ruins of the Second World War wrecked his epic programme for the *Cantos*.²⁶

Massimo Bacigalupo characterizes *The Cantos* as “among other things, the sacred poem of the Nazi-Fascist millennium which mercifully never eventuated.”²⁷ There is little doubt that after Pound settled in Italy in the mid-1920s he idealised Benito Mussolini as a man of action. *The Cantos* recall Pound’s audience with “the Boss” in January 1933, in which Mussolini apparently said that he found *A Draft of XXX Cantos* “divertente” (Canto 41), fuelling the fantasy that Pound might educate this authoritarian leader in matters of statecraft. In 1936, once the League of Nations had condemned Italy (imposing economic sanctions), Pound grew further estranged from the Western democracies, which he believed were puppets of powerful Jewish financiers. He said as much in his Rome Radio broadcasts to America on the outbreak of war, leading to his indictment for treason in the US in July 1943. Following Allied bombing which damaged Pound’s beloved Italian monuments, he fled north to join Mussolini’s supporters in the Salò Republic. In 1944, he composed two remarkable

propagandist pro-Fascist cantos in Italian (Cantos 72-73). They dramatize the ghosts of the recently deceased Futurist F. T. Marinetti and Dante's furious Ezzelino da Romano echoing Cavalcanti in a cry of defiant resistance ("ricossa"). Arrested and interrogated by the FBI, Pound was transferred to the US Army Disciplinary Training Center outside Pisa in May 1945, where he was caged in an open-air, reinforced steel cell measuring six feet by six and a half, exposed to hot dusty winds, drenching rain and cold nights. After three weeks, Pound, in his sixtieth year, suffered a breakdown and was moved to a tent within the medical compound. Allowed writing materials, he began drafting *The Pisan Cantos*. They open with a lament for Mussolini's downfall: "The enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant's bent shoulders" (Canto 74).

Eliot's blurb for the 1949 Faber edition of *The Pisan Cantos* spoke of them with quiet authority as "more lucid and more moving than some of their predecessors, with the same technical mastery but a new poignancy of human speech" – poignancy that derives from the extremity of the circumstances in which Pound was placed: "the loneliness of death came upon me / (at 3 P. M., for an instant)" (Canto 82); "There is a fatigue deep as the grave" (Canto 83).²⁸ Pound's mythopoetic imagination dwells on a sacred landscape of sunrises and sunsets, clouds over the surrounding mountains, Pisa couched in the distance, even the activities of GIs in the camp. Microscopic attention is lavished on the industry of ants and wasps, the flights of birds and butterflies. *The Pisan Cantos* is lyrical elegy concentrated on a solipsistic universe of arresting power: fragmentation mirrors the free associations of a self in crisis. Here creative memory – fructifying but at times also falsifying – is an index of the strength of passion for lost persons and places:

nothing matters but the quality
of the affection –
in the end – that has carved the trace in the mind (Canto 76)

In the Pisan prison camp resurgent images of Venice come flooding back; nostalgia suffused with painful yearning ("free then, therein the difference"). Pound recalls the day in 1908 when he considered dumping the proofs ("le bozze") of his first volume of poetry, *A Lume Spento*, into the Grand Canal:

by the soap-smooth stone posts where San Vio
meets with il Canal Grande
between Salviati and the house that was of Don Carlos
shd / I chuck the lot into the tide-water?
le bozze "A Lume Spento"/ (Canto 76)

In Canto 83, remembrance of a Venetian servant's remark ("Non combaattere" said Giovanna" to the combative Pound), triggers a cascade of Venetian churches, palazzi and people he may never see again:

Will I ever see the Giudecca again?
or the lights against it, Ca'Foscari, Ca'Giustinian
or the Ca', as they say, Desdemona
or the two towers where are the cypress no more
or the boats moored off le Zattere
or the north quai of the Sensaria DAKRUŌN ΔAKPYΩN (Canto 83)

St Elizabeth's Hospital, Washington. These works were quarried for their lessons on good government and the evils of usury.³⁵ Yet scholars have laboured hard to sieve poetic gold in *Rock-Drill* from pages of dross. Canto 85 transcribes over one hundred Chinese characters (their incorporation highlights Pound's claim to intuit etymologies unknown to Sinologists from "ideograms"); Egyptian hieroglyphics and an imperfect grasp of ancient Greek join the deconstructive free-play of the signifier in *Rock-Drill*. Following a turgid digest of stretches of Senator Benton's first-hand account of early nineteenth-century American politics, a series of visionary "paradisal" cantos bring a much-needed lyric fluency. Contemporary reviewers, however, regretted the alarming decline represented by *Rock-Drill*. Donald Davie concluded: "Either this is the waste of a prodigious talent, or else it is the poetry of the future."³⁶

Thrones de los Cantares (1959) was the next didactic instalment of synchronic source material with an emphasis on political and economic heroism. After his release from St Elizabeth's, Pound informed Donald Hall: "The thrones in Dante's *Paradiso* are for the spirits of the people who have been responsible for good government." He explained that his own *Thrones* "concerns the states of mind of people responsible for something more than their personal conduct."³⁷ Estimation of the success of this block of cantos depends on assiduous enquiry into Pound's appropriation of historical, legal, philosophical, ethnographical and economic texts in this sprawling section: exegetes have wrestled with the metaphysical and philological implications of a welter of legal reforms in Byzantium, ancient ritual practices in China, the history of coinage and the defence of the Magna Carta in seventeenth-century England with small delight. Davie pronounced *Thrones* inert and tiresome: "my quite assiduous labours on those many pages yielded me only Dead Sea fruit."³⁸ The black shawls worn by Venetian women in mourning (Canto 106) attract the greatest attention, since they are linked to Pound's fascination with occult Eleusianian rites shrouding the mystery of life after death.

Pound's final limpid cantos, written before a silence of paralysed depression, represent the fulfilment of his Dantean aspiration "to write Paradise" (Canto 117). His *Drafts and Fragments* revisit the sacred places. In Canto 116, the last complete canto, the poet, radiant with joy, lifts his eyes towards stark Byzantine mosaics in the ruined basilica on the deserted island of Torcello:

again is all "paradiso"
 a nice quiet paradise
 over the shambles,
 and some climbing
 before the take-off (Canto 116)

There is a bleak, exquisite pathos in Pound's vacillations between a former dogmatic confidence ("i.e. it coheres all right / even if my notes do not cohere") buffeted by his post-Pisan doubts ("Many errors, / a little rightness"). A soaring Dantean invocation of "the gold thread in the pattern / (Torcello)" (Canto 116) offers a mystical vision of his religion of art as an act of faith. These palpitations of affirmation, confession, and despair muster sufficient self-knowledge, hard-won through a lifetime of experience, not to permit any easeful repose in an art free of the fury and mire of human veins:

To confess wrong without losing rightness:
 Charity I have had sometimes,
 I cannot make it flow thru.
 A little light, like a rushlight

to lead back to splendour. (Canto 116)

Pound's assertions that he botched *The Cantos* – “my errors and wrecks lie about me / and I am not a demigod, / I cannot make it cohere” (Canto 116) – should be treated with caution. The textual instability of successive editions of *Drafts and Fragments* makes it unwise to extrapolate any final authorial judgement on this poem of some length. Eliot was more confident that *Four Quartets* set a crown upon his lifetime's achievement.³⁹ Although he bestowed Dante's epithet “il miglior fabbro” on Pound; it is unclear, all things considered, whether “the better craftsman” was a better poet.

¹ “To be a ‘devotional poet’ is a limitation: a saint limits himself by writing poetry, and a poet who confines himself to even this subject matter is limiting himself too.” *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber, 1934), p.48.

² In a letter, Eliot translated these two epigraphs as follows: “Although the Logos is common, the majority of men live as if they had an individual understanding” and “the way up and the way down are the same”.

³ In the *Confessions* St Augustine meditates on the problem of time, drawing a tripartite distinction between “a present of things past, a present of things present, a present of things future” (Book XI, chap. xx).

⁴ See Harding “T. S. Eliot, 1925-1935”, *Scrutiny* (September 1936), pp.171-6.

⁵ “Garlic and sapphires in the mud” evokes Mallarmé's enigmatic lines “Tonnerre et rubis aux moyeux” and “Sépulcrale d'égout bavant boue et rubis”.

⁶ The word “pattern” appears ten times in the *Quartets*.

⁷ Introduction, *Le Serpent par Paul Valéry* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1924), p.12.

⁸ Quoted in *The Composition of “Four Quartets”*, ed. Helen Gardner (London: Faber, 1978), p. 26.

⁹ Eliot's direct ancestor Andrew Eliot emigrated from East Coker to America in the 1660s.

¹⁰ Eliot confirmed that this passage was adapted from *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*.

¹¹ Quoted in *Composition of “Four Quartets”*, p.109.

¹² “What we have words for, we have already got beyond.” *Twilight of the Idols*, VIII (1895). The original German is “Wofür wir Worte haben, darüber sind wir auch schon hinaus”.

¹³ “Through caverns measureless to man / Down to a sunless sea.” “Kubla Khan” lines 4-5. See Cleo McNelly Kearns's account of what Krishna meant to Eliot in *T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions* (Cambridge UP, 1987), pp. 245-53.

¹⁴ Davie's writings on *Four Quartets* are collected in his *Modernist Essays*, ed. Clive Wilmer (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004). Henry Reed parodied Eliot's pontifical manner in “Chard Whitlow” (1941).

¹⁵ *For Lancelot Andrewes* (London: Faber, 1928), p.76.

¹⁶ Quoted in *Composition of “Four Quartets”*, p.234.

¹⁷ Acknowledgement in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber, 1944), p.5.

¹⁸ *Composition of “Four Quartets”*, p.169.

¹⁹ In his 1940 memorial lecture, Eliot quoted Yeats's lines: “You think it horrible that lust and rage / Should dance attendance upon my old age.” Aside from the allusions to and parallels with Yeats, commentators have detected the presence of Virgil, Dante,

Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Dr. Johnson, Shelley, Tennyson, Arnold, Poe, Mallarmé, Kipling and Henry James in this “compound ghost”.

²⁰ Hayward had in mind “ubi saeva indignation ulterius cor lacerare nequit” from Swift’s tomb, translated memorably by Yeats in “Swift’s Epitaph”.

²¹ The ghost’s words suggest lines from Yeats’s “Vacillation” quoted by Eliot in his Virginia lectures: “Things said or done long years ago, / Or things I did not do or say / But thought that I might say or do, / Weigh me down, and not a day / But something is recalled, / My conscience or my vanity appalled.” *After Strange Gods*, p.46.

²² In *Paradiso* XXX-XXXI, Beatrice guides Dante to Paradise discovered as a vast white rose composed of blessed souls.

²³ See *After Strange Gods*, pp.42-3; “Introduction”, *Ezra Pound: Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1928), p.19.

²⁴ Quoted in Ronald Schuchard, “T. S. Eliot as Publisher”, *Areté* (Summer/Autumn 2007), p.76. Pound’s annoyance over the censorship of references to the Rothschilds is recounted in Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (New York: Delta, 1988), p.570.

²⁵ Pound defends his “ideogrammic method” in *The ABC of Reading* (London: Faber, 1934), pp.17-27.

²⁶ For Pound’s comments on epic, see *The ABC of Reading*, p.46.

²⁷ Bacigalupo, *The Formed Trace* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), p.x.

²⁸ Quoted in “T. S. Eliot as Publisher”, pp.82-3.

²⁹ Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 491.

³⁰ Anthony Woodward, *Ezra Pound and “The Pisan Cantos”* (London: Routledge, 1980), pp.7, 35.

³¹ Aristotle discusses the structure of beauty in the *Poetics*, 1450b34-1451a6

³² Peter Makin, *Ezra Pound’s “Cantos”: A Casebook* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp.102-3.

³³ “Ezra Pound in Pisa” (1968) in *Modernist Essays*, p.242.

³⁴ “Ezra Pound: An Interview” quoted in Makin, *Ezra Pound’s “Cantos”*, p.258.

³⁵ The key source-texts for Cantos 85-87 are the editions of the Confucian *Shu jing* (Book of History) by Séraphin Couvreur and James Legge; Thomas Hart Benton’s *Thirty Years’ View* (1856) provides the background and colour for Cantos 88 and 89.

³⁶ Donald Davie, “Bed-Rock”, *New Statesman and Nation* (9 March 1957), p.317.

³⁷ Quoted in “Ezra Pound: An Interview”, pp.258-9.

³⁸ Davie, *Modernist Essays*, p.237.

³⁹ For Eliot’s assessment of *Four Quartets*, see his interview with Donald Hall, *Poetry Review* (March 1961), pp.15-20.